

STATE OF WISCONSIN

JIM DOYLE
GOVERNOR

November 26, 2003

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY:

I am vetoing Assembly Bill 259 in its entirety. This bill allows a student to continue in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program regardless of family income. It also deletes the cap on the number of students who may participate in the program and eliminates the prior year attendance requirements.

I am vetoing this bill because it significantly expands the program beyond its original intent, it has significant financial implications to both Milwaukee Public Schools and the state, and it could jeopardize the quality of the program. By removing the cap on family income, the program would no longer be targeted solely at low-income Milwaukee families. For example, a family whose income may be temporarily below the 175 percent of poverty threshold while one or both parents attend medical school would be forever eligible to have taxpayer paid tuition even if its income increases to several times the state average.

Completely repealing the Choice program enrollment cap, which is currently set at 15 percent of Milwaukee Public Schools enrollment, has both long-term cost and quality implications. Every additional 1,000 students who would attend choice schools due to a repeal of the cap would cost Milwaukee taxpayers an additional \$2.7 million and state taxpayers another \$3.3 million. In addition, the problems with the quality of education in a few Choice schools, due in part to the Legislature's reluctance to enact any meaningful measures to hold these largely taxpayer supported schools accountable for the quality of the services they provide, will no doubt be exacerbated if enrollment limits were completely removed.

Lastly, repealing the prior year attendance requirements would begin to shift the program away from its intent to provide an alternative to Milwaukee Public Schools and more towards creating a system of taxpayer supported sectarian and nonsectarian private schools. In times of limited state resources and the importance of strong public schools to the economic future of the state, the focus of state resources should be on strengthening public schools throughout the state. While private school choice has provided an alternative to address the unique circumstances and problems facing education in Milwaukee, it should remain the exception rather than the rule.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Doyle', written over a printed name and title.

JIM DOYLE
Governor